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INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 9358
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 6254
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 4297
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 3122
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9864
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 3216
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0321
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2293
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 6808
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 4672
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001352

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: US REQUESTS INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS,
MFA ASSISTANCE TO EVACUATE HUMANITARIAN MINE ACTION
PERSONNEL

REF: COLOMBO 1324 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: James R. Moore, Charge' d'Affaires, for reasons 1.4(b,d)

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11. (C) One Amcit under the auspices of UNHCR and four non-Amcit US-funded humanitarian mine action officers are currently stranded in Government of Sri Lanka (GSL)-controlled Jaffna, separated from the rest of the island by an expanse of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)-controlled territory, commonly known as the "Vanni." On August 11, intense fighting broke out between GSL forces and the LTTE at the military's Forward Defense Line (FDL) and the island of Kayts on the Jaffna Peninsula in northern Sri Lanka (reftels). Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia (PDAS) Steven Mann visited Sri Lanka on August 16-17 to urge an immediate cessation of hostilities (septel). In his August 17 meeting with PDAS Mann, Army Commander General Fonseka stated, and other sources confirm, that hostilities in the Jaffna peninsula will not cease until the GSL has achieved its military objectives in the area. All US-funded and other humanitarian mine action programs have been suspended in Jaffna indefinitely. In light of the current security and supply concerns, we have joined with the Australians, British, and other missions to request that the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) to evacuate expatriates from the Jaffna Peninsula and LTTE-controlled Kilinochchi in the Vanni. We, along with other missions, have also asked the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense to propose an alternate evacuation strategy. There are currently three evacuation strategies on the table (only two of which apply to our personnel in Jaffna): a road convoy from LTTE-controlled Kilinochchi along the A9 highway, a ferry from Jaffna bearing the ICRC flag, and a military helicopter evacuation from Jaffna.

12. (C) Three US-funded deminers -- an Australian-national RONCO technical advisor and two (British and Kosovar) HALO Trust officers -- wish to leave by Sri Lanka military helicopter and are on standby to evacuate Jaffna. A fourth HALO Trust deminer, a UK-citizen, will either take the helicopter or wait for an ICRC ferry. The military informed

RONCO program manager August 18 that it expects to evacuate humanitarian mine action personnel (including non-US-funded Danish Demining Group personnel) on August 19 or 20. The one Amcit in Jaffna, working with the UNHCR, has chosen not to evacuate at this time.

13. (C) An ICRC convoy scheduled to leave August 18 from the UN Compound in Kilinochchi was cancelled that morning due to LTTE objections, according to a British diplomat. At approximately 2 PM on August 18, poloff learned from a journalist source that the Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF) was presently bombing Kilinochchi and that the GSL had asked all international NGO staff to leave the area. According to military sources, while the GSL checkpoint leading out of the Vanni had been opened August 18 to allow the humanitarian corridor, the LTTE refused to open its congruent check point to allow NGO vehicles to pass. We do not know at present whether there are expatriate or civilian casualties from the reported air raids. The diplomatic community will push for the ICRC convoy to be rescheduled for August 21.

14. (C) The ICRC has also hired a ferry that will be moved from Trincomalee Harbor to a High Security Zone (HSZ) in Jaffna beginning August 21 to evacuate up to 300 expatriates, including NGO and international agency staff and Tamil expatriates. Due to the slow speed of the ferry and security requirements for moving civilians (including many dual nationals with Tamil surnames) through the HSZ, the ferry cannot be expected to return to a safe area near Trincomalee until at least August 24-25.

15. (C) Aware of the ICRC evacuation plans, Jaffna Government

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Agent (GA) Ganesh phoned poloff August 18 to ask us to urge the ICRC to send food supplies to Jaffna immediately via evacuation vessles. He believes current supplies will last for another ten days. "We cannot afford to lose the lives of civilians," he said. "Please see that both sides stop the hostilities." Poloff noted that PDAS Mann had recently stressed that message and reiterated concern over the humanitarian situation. Several expatriate NGO staff informed poloff August 18 that they have only a week to 10 days supply of foodstuffs remaining, and that supplies of food in Jaffna shops has rapidly deminished with each brief relaxation of the curfew.

16. (C) The Embassy is working with National Steering Committee for Mine Action (NSCMA) Director Dr. Kunasingham and HALO Trust Program Manager Stephen Pritchard to evaluate the possibility of relocating HALO's mine action program to Anuradhapura, a heavily mined belt in central Sri Lanka, in part to utilize new funding from the U.S.-based Humpty Dumpty Institute (HDI).

MOORE